

**PARK COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF LEON VALLEY, TEXAS  
NOVEMBER 10, 2015 MEETING MINUTES**

The Park Commission of the City of Leon Valley, Texas met on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of November, 2015 at 7:00 p.m. at Raymond Rimkus Park, at 6440 Evers Road, Leon Valley, Texas, for the purpose of the following business, to-wit:

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**LEON VALLEY PARK COMMISSION MEETING, 7:00 P.M.**

**1. Call the Meeting to Order and Determine a Quorum is Present.**

Chairman Roger Christensen called the Park Commission meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., with the following Park Commissioners in attendance: Commissioners Linda Tarin, Carolyn Gabriel, Steve Parker, Belinda Ealy, Benay Cacciatore, and Josue De La Torre. Absent and excused were Commissioners Dorothy Humphrey, Jackie Walton, and Kathy Hill. Also present was City Councilmember Monica Alcocer and City Staff member Melinda Moritz.

**2. Review and Approval of the October 13, 2015 Regular Park Commission Meeting Minutes.**

Commissioner Parker made a motion to approve the minutes from the September 8, 2015 Regular Park Commission meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ealy. The minutes were approved unanimously.

**3. Citizens to be Heard**

Resident Al Uvietta of 6923 Sunlight Drive addressed the Commission stating that he had been a resident of Leon Valley since 1972, and that he had been the author of the first Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan, and the original ordinance for the Huebner Onion Natural Area Park. He further noted that he, along with other members of the early Park Commission, had created the rules for Raymond Rimkus Park, and that he had been keeping up with the direction the Park Commission was going. He stated that the Park Commission was the liaison between the City Council and the public, and that they were charged with making recommendations to the City Council, based on input from the public. He explained that past Park Commissions had sent out surveys to the public and had found that the majority of persons adjacent to the park did not want any night time activities to be held at the park, which was why the ordinance had a sun down provision. He further explained that local wildlife used the creek and the park as a conduit to other areas of the city and that night time activities at the park would disturb the wildlife. He urged the Commission to carefully consider any requests to use the park after dark as it may encourage distasteful uses. He then explained that the Park Commission needed to engage in planning efforts for the Huebner – Onion Natural Area Park, as well as the rest of the park areas in the City.

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**4. Report on Activities that Impact the Park or Access to the Park**

**a. A. Discussion and Possible Recommendations –**

**1. Add Variance Procedure to Park Ordinance**

Staff member Moritz addressed the Commission and explained that the current Park Ordinance did not have a variance procedure. She stated that without a variance procedure in the code, any requests for variations from the code could not be heard by the Park Commission or the City Council. She noted that two requests for variances had been received to date. She then explained the procedures and the proposed language to be added to the park ordinance. After general discussion, a motion was made by Commissioner Cacciatore to approve a change to the Park Ordinance to provide for a variance procedure. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gabriel. The motion passed unanimously.

**2. Request for Variance – San Antonio Astronomical Society**

Matthew Rottman of the San Antonio Astronomical Society addressed the Commission, stating that his non-profit group would like permission to use the large parking lot at Raymond Rimkus Park every Wednesday evening from sundown to approximately 10:00 pm. He stated that he had asked for the use of the parking lot at the Community and Conference Center grounds, but that the parking lot lights were too bright for optimal conditions. He noted that the parking lot at the park was much better for their activities.

Mr. Rottman stated that his group currently used the parking area at McAllister Park, but that the recent addition of lights at that facility triggered their search for a darker place. He noted that they had also held their events at various other locations and had been well received by the general public. He explained that typical operations would include setting up five or six privately owned telescopes just after dusk, and then allowing the general public to view the night sky. The group then explains each of the stars and other objects in the sky to the public, providing an education in astronomy. He noted that attendance varied with the seasons, with a typical group of 20 to 40 persons, unless a Boy Scout or other organization attended. He stated that they do travel to other venues such as the zoo, other parks, and that they had been invited to the Historical



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Society's events in the past. He noted that most of the time they would have 10 to 30 persons in attendance, but that they could have as many as 100 for special occasions. He further noted that students from Northwest Vista received extra credit for their attendance at the events.

Chairman Christensen commented that he wondered what impact this activity would have on the surrounding neighborhoods and that if the event attracted 100 persons, there would be between 50 to 75 vehicles in the park parking lot. He also noted that the Community Center parking area would be a better place for this use. He asked if the events always lasted until 10:30 pm., and if the group charged an admission for the event.

Mr. Rottman replied, stating that the parking area they are currently using is much smaller than Raymond Rimkus Park and that the events that attract 100 persons would be limited to one to two times per year. He also stated that the Community Center parking lot lights could be turned off by blocking the photocell, but he was not comfortable doing so. He noted that he was working with the City of San Antonio to find another venue, but they had not found anything yet, and that Raymond Rimkus Park was their preferred area, due to the reliable darkness. Mr. Rottman stated that the 10:30 pm ending time was generic, as the times changed with the seasons. He explained that it takes 30 – 40 minutes for a human eye to get accustomed to the dark, so it might be a little later in the summer and earlier in the winter. He noted that they would be happy to end all events at 10:30 pm, if so requested by the City. He stated that they provide this activity at no charge to the public.

Commissioner Ealy stated that she was an amateur astronomer and had been to some of their events, and that she was surprised to see the group in Leon Valley. She agreed with Mr. Rottman, stating that light pollution from the Community Center parking lot would make stargazing difficult, and that she appreciated the need for a completely dark area. She noted that the park parking lot was ideal in that it was a flat, level area, with no parking lot lights, and that the group would attract a minimal amount of vehicles on most occasions, as she expected people to want to walk to the park. She noted that there were current users of the park using headlights after dark at sports events that the City seems unable to limit and that this use might reduce that occurrence, by having official permission to use the parking area. She noted that the only light used by the astronomers were

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tiny flashlights to see their notes. She stated that she would like to see the variance granted.

Mr. Rottman replied, stating that they lights they used were red in color, as it does take some time to re-accustom eyes to the dark with a bright white light. He noted that the group has signs that they place at the entrance that prohibits headlights and states other stargazing etiquette and rules.

Commissioner Gabriel asked if their gear was heavy, and then stated that they could divert vehicular traffic to other areas.

Mr. Rottman stated that the gear was heavy, which is why they brought it in vehicles. He informed the Commission that the dark at the park was "golden" and that they should strive to keep it that way.

Commissioner Parker stated that the group sounded like an excellent organization in that they used their skills as a teaching opportunity, had minimal impact on the surrounding neighborhoods, and that his only concern was the high number of attendance. He made a motion to approve the variance.

Chairman Christensen stated that before any action was taken, the Commission needed to consider the radical change this variance approval would make to the hours and allowed activities at the park. He explained his experience in developing the Silo Park and that ideas he thought were great turned out to not be thought of so highly by the surrounding neighbors at that area. He stated that there needed to be an active survey of the neighborhoods around Raymond Rimkus Park to gauge their opinions of this new usage and other possible night uses at the park. He stated that, in his opinion, there was not enough information to proceed with an approval of this request.

Commissioner Gabriel noted that night activities were already occurring at the park, such as the Jazz Festival and Movies in the Park, without the benefit of an approved variance.

Commissioner Parker stated that each of the proposed uses would have to come before the Park Commission and the City Council for approval on an individual basis. He noted that a worst case scenario would be a request for night basketball. He noted that this particular use seemed

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appropriate and that it would have minimal impact on the surrounding area.

Councilmember Alcocer stated that any action was premature, as there was no variance procedure in place.

Mr. Rottman replied, stating that the group was only asking for one night event at this time.

Chairman Christensen disagreed, stating that once approved, it opened the door for more variance requests. He noted that the criteria would have to be applied across the board.

Commissioner Parker stated that consideration of a variance would mean the Commission had the responsibility of assuring the request meets certain criteria and that they would not vote for approval unless a request met those criteria. He further noted that each case would stand on its own merit and that some would be disapproved.

Chairman Christensen stated that while he agree with that comment, he still thought the Commission needed to consider the citizen's opinions prior to making such a decision, as this activity was a drastic change to current operations.

Commissioner Ealy stated that the Commission needed to make a motion directing staff to survey the surrounding neighborhoods to determine how they would feel about granting requests for nighttime activities in the park. Mr. De La Torre stated he would second the motion.

Commissioner Parker stated that he would like to amend the motion to include attorney review of the proposed park ordinance variance procedures to assure that quality of life is listed as a qualifier for granting or denying a variance, and to assure the proposed survey is formatted to give options for what type of night time activities would be acceptable to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Commissioner Josue De La Torre added that he would like to add recommended times to the survey.



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Chairman Christensen asked if there was any further discussion and, seeing none, he asked for a new motion.

A motion was made by Commissioner Ealy to postpone the variance request until such time as a survey process is completed and the City Attorney had reviewed and approved the variance request provisions for the park ordinance. The motion was seconded by Commissioner De La Torre.

**b. Park Master Plan – Summary and Recommendations**

Chairman Christensen stated that the recommendations in the 2014 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan needed to be reviewed and revised, as several of the items had been completed. He noted that Recommendations #1, 13, 14, and 18 should be deleted, and that in the future, recommendations should be placed in an annex, instead of in the actual document, so that they could be revised as time passed, without having to revise the entire Plan. He noted that this would make revising the actual Plan easier.

**d. Silo Park – Status of Water Well and Update, and Detention Pond Functionality**

Staff member Moritz gave a brief update on the Silo Park, stating that the 68 trees left over from the Arbor Day event had been planted at the Silo Park and that the trail had been started. She noted that the plantings had been done with care, so that the well driller would not destroy the work. She explained that the well project should get started in the spring of 2016, after which, the Silo Park improvements could be completed.

**f. Evers Road Crosswalk Lighting and Signage**

Staff member Moritz explained that the crosswalk had been improved by the installation of brick pavers, lit LED signage, and a mid-street bollard, and that the improvements seemed to be working a little too well. She noted that she has seen vehicles stopped at the crosswalk when no persons were present, which almost caused an accident.

Commissioner Ealy stated that she had seen the opposite effect, and also the crosswalk was completely dark at night. She noted that the City could invest in solar powered lights that the City would own, which would save money by not paying a monthly fee for a street light.

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Staff member Moritz stated that she had investigated solar powered lights for the entire crosswalk and the type she had reviewed cost approximately \$25,000 to purchase and install. She then stated that she had called CPS Energy and requested that street lights be installed at both the crosswalk and at Evers and Poss, but that it had been three months since she made the request. She noted that she would investigate the solar power options further.

**g. Flood Impact and Damages to Raymond Rimkus Park, Natural Area, and Triangle Park**

Staff member Moritz explained that the last two floods had resulted in damages to the park and that crews had been working hard to keep up.

Commissioner Parker mentioned that at the previous meeting at the park, the Commissioners had made lists of repairs needed at the park. He asked when those repairs would be made and how that played into the current budget for the park. Staff member Moritz stated that the park budget had enough money to cover necessary repairs in this current fiscal year.

**5. Commissioner and Staff Comments**

Chairman Christensen opened the discussion reminding the Commission that this portion of the agenda was intended for Commissioners to make statements about items to be discussed and not for open debate on items not listed in the agenda.

Commissioner De La Torre asked what happened to the benches at the Triangle Park, to which Staff member Moritz replied that they had been removed after repeated incidents of vandalism and tagging.

Commissioner Cacciatore noted that the meetings had been very informative.

Commissioner Tarin asked if a Jazz Festival was planned for the park, to which Commissioner Ealy answered no.

Chairman Christensen stated that there were several resources to be contacted for help with projects in the Park, such as numbering the tables, and mentioned the Boy Scouts willingness to help. He announced an informal walk through was

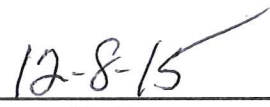
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planned for the Natural Area Park on Saturday, November 14, 2015, at 2:00 pm, and that they would meet at the Community Garden area. He encouraged the Commissioners to attend. He then stated that the next Regular Park Commission meeting was to be held on December 8, 2015, at 7:00 pm, at the Leon Valley Conference Center, 6421 Evers Road.

**6. Adjourn.**

A motion was made by Commissioner Parker to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Commissioner Gabriel, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:51 pm.

  
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Roger Christensen - Chairman

  
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Date